DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 005 PS 024 944

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TITLE Fish Hoek Middle School: Issues of Education Reform in South Africa.
PUB DATE 2 Nov 96
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Middle School Association (Baltimore, MD, November 2, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Apartheid; *Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; Educational Planning; Educational Strategies; Foreign Countries; Interdisciplinary Approach; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Professional Development; Program Descriptions; Social Change; Team Teaching
IDENTIFIERS Developmentally Appropriate Programs; *South Africa (Cape Province)

ABSTRACT

Education in South Africa has mirrored the inequality and socio-political upheaval that has marked that country's history since the official establishment of apartheid in 1948. This paper provides a brief summary of some of the main issues impacting education in South Africa, a description of Fish Hoek Middle School just south of Capetown, an outline of some key middle schooling practices at the school, a discussion of the role of the school in promoting educational continuity in its community, and concluding remarks on current issues and future directions for the school. The paper begins with a look at apartheid's impact on education and the challenges faced in reconstituting the country's educational system and curriculum. Fish Hoek Middle School is described in terms of its developmentally appropriate nature, its mission, interdisciplinary team-teaching organization, guidance program, and exploratory mini-course program. The paper continues with a look at the school's role as a bridge between traditional elementary and secondary education, and concludes with a discussion of remaining problems in the areas of teachers' professional development and the country's centralized external examination system. Contains 10 references. (EV)

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Fish Hoek Middle School: Issues of Education Reform in South Africa

National Middle School Association Annual Conference
Baltimore, Maryland
Saturday 2 November 1996

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Fish Hoek Middle School is located in South Africa's Western Cape, on the coast just south of Capetown. In many ways it is unique. Geographically and administratively shielded from some of the political upheaval and some of the educational disarray that has gripped many areas of South Africa, the school has taken the opportunity to focus on internal educational issues when many others have been paralysed by the very real socio-political, resourcing, and facilities concerns of a system reinventing itself. When a 'delegation of middle school educators' from Australia, Canada and the United States visited South Africa in late 1995 at the invitation of the South African government, we found that, in general, middle schooling issues were not of great interest to a system in a state of extreme flux and in rebuilding mode. Fish Hoek Middle School, on the other hand, had been able for some years to take on board the issues and concepts related to developmentally appropriate education for young adolescents - and welcomed the group's input. To some extent the school had been able to work independently of the broader context. In the end, however, schools cannot operate in a vacuum, and Fish Hoek Middle School's reforms have been in some ways defined and limited by broader socio-political and macro-educational considerations.

This paper will provide a (necessarily) brief summary of some of the main issues impacting on education in South Africa, a description of Fish Hoek Middle School, an outline of some key middle schooling practices at the school, a discussion of the role of the school in promoting educational continuity in its community, and some concluding remarks on current issues and future directions for Fish Hoek Middle School.

Apartheid, Rebuilding, and Education

Education in South Africa has mirrored the inequality and socio-political upheaval that has marked that country's history since the official establishment of apartheid in 1948. Up until the election of the 'Government of National Unity' in 1994, there were nineteen different education departments organised along regional and racial lines, with different levels of resourcing, both financial and human, leading to staggering inequities in school facilities, teacher training and expertise, class sizes, etc. The curriculum, driven by the national exam system, reflected the interests and values of the ruling white minority. Black children, according to Jerome Murphy (1992, p. 369), would learn 'about history and it's European history. They learn about how inferior they are because of studying battles where whites beat blacks'. Further, Afrikaans was the dominant

language of instruction, with some emphasis on English but very little on African languages. As Murphy (1992, p. 370) argues:

> Apartheid's social engineers, reinforced by South African history and culture, have concocted a system that makes it difficult for black children to become well-educated, to take pride in their heritage, or to learn to think for themselves.

It is little wonder that black schools were one of the centres of civil disobedience and protest during the 1980s. Many closed as students went on indefinite strike and took up the political cause of the African National Congress. Schools were attacked and vandalised; teachers stood by and watched powerlessly or joined the struggle. The results have been: the creation of a lost generation - now in their late teens to late twenties - who missed out on an education (and many of whom are antagonistic to education); the loss of a culture of learning and of respect for learning; a system in disarray; and a range of discipline problems with senior students who have returned to the schools (Grundy 1995; Johnson 1995).

The task in rebuilding education in South Africa is therefore enormous. The nineteen separate departments have been reduced to nine provincial departments responsible for implementation of education policy and one national department responsible for formulation of policy and guidelines.

One of the major tasks of the national body is to develop a National Qualifications Framework (see appendix A). The framework is to replace a whole range of different regional and institutional qualifications with one national, coordinated, hierarchy of qualifications. The base of this hierarchy is to be the General Education Certificate (GEC) which would be completed by the end of standard 7 (grade 9) or through a three-tiered Adult Basic Education and Training program[1]

The other major task of the national body is to provide an overview and direction for educational planning for the future. This has been encapsulated in the *White Paper on Education and Training*, released late in 1995 (see appendix B). In implementing the guiding principles of the White Paper, the Western

[1] It is believed that this qualification will take a learning outcomes approach, with students progressing towards these outcomes throughout their compulsory schooling. The availability of the GEC through a system of adult basic education and training is a major imperative - as a large percentage of the adult population missed opportunities for education during the long period of social and political inequality and upheaval.

Cape Education Department (WCED), the least disrupted and therefore most organised of the nine provincial departments, sees itself facing the following curriculum-related challenges:

- To promote a values-based understanding of education in which the curriculum serves as an instrument guiding human development
- To build trust and mutual understanding between learners, teachers, officials and communities coming from the former systems
- To acknowledge the existing expertise regarding curriculum development and to empower all teachers to participate in a meaningful way in curriculum development on appropriate operational levels
- To develop a generally accepted vision for education and training in the Western Cape Province and inspire all stakeholders to implement this vision in practical terms
- To promote a culture of teaching, learning and development that is conducive to effective and creative implementation of the curriculum
- To shift from a mainly prescriptive bureaucratic mode to one of social co-responsibility in which all role-players understand and share the meaning of educational accountability.
- To find a sound balance between content (knowledge, skills and values) which is universally valid and content which can be useful within a specific context
- To develop an appropriate network for curriculum development in the Western Cape Province and for facilitating WCED involvement in national structures for curriculum development and the National Qualification Framework (NQF).

(Western Cape Education Department 1995b, p. 1)

The Western Cape Education Department had also developed a series of aims for students in the middle years of schooling. As grade 9 is the end of what will become 'compulsory' schooling - and will therefore, realistically, be the end point of education for many students - the aims for the middle years of schooling take on a somewhat more 'preparation for life' flavour than is the case in either Australia or Northern America:

> Supplementary to the aims which apply in the primary school phases, specific attention is paid from the junior secondary school phase onward to the orientation of learners towards:
>
> - the challenges of the adult world
> - the demands made on them as individuals in terms of the world of work and choices they will have to make
> - economic systems, economic literacy and entrepreneurial skills
> - various religions and cultures
> - social and community life, including married and family life
> - the implications of Grade 9 being the exit point of compulsory general education.
>
> (Western Cape Education Department 1995b, p. 2)

What, then, do the perspectives outlined above suggest? South Africa is clearly in rebuilding mode. In the area of education they are recreating a system in almost every dimension. In most cases the officials and administrators with whom our delegation spoke were not yet in a position to focus on issues of developmentally appropriate education for early adolescents. They were still sorting through the 'macro-issues' - financing, guiding frameworks, damage repair, and the development of lifelong learning through adult education to compensate for years of lost educational opportunity. The Western Cape Education Department's middle schooling concerns listed above reflect these macro interests - they are still looking at the way education in general fits into the rebuilding and redevelopment agenda of the new South Africa. This is certainly understandable; however, it is perhaps to be regretted that it has not been possible for South African educators to take a more long-sighted view on this issue. Long-established education systems like those in Australia, the USA and Canada are presently considering the way their structures and practices have perhaps not best served students in the middle - and they are gradually making changes and adaptations to better accommodate these new understandings (Australian Curriculum Studies Association 1996; Beane 1993; George & Alexander 1993; Hargreaves & Earl 1994). There is no better time to put into place new ideas than when planning and rebuilding a system from scratch. And in a situation where a severe lack of resources will make it impossible for so many young South Africans to have the opportunity to be 'schooled' in the traditional sense, the middle schooling emphasis on problem solving and community learning may well play a useful role in educational redevelopment. At present these concepts are being picked up in very few schools in South Africa, and very little (if at all) at the administrative level.

Fish Hoek Middle School

One South African school that has focussed on issues of developmentally responsive education for young adolescents is Fish Hoek Middle School. This is one of only two middle schools in South Africa. It was established in 1986 to 'provide an all-round programme of education specifically designed for eleven to fifteen year old pupils, recognising that early adolescents constitute a distinct group, physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually'. When the need

emerged for a second high school to be built to cater for the excessive enrolment at the original Fish Hoek High School, the close-knit community of Fish Hoek preferred the establishment of a dual campus school rather than two separate high schools because of the potential for division and rivalry. Consequently, in the town of Fish Hoek, there is one preparatory school, one primary school, one middle school and one senior high school. Each school has the same school colours, badge, and uniform. The Middle School and the Senior High School are governed by the same decision-making body, the Board of Governors, and 'all four schools work very closely together as part of a big family' (Fish Hoek Schools nd, p. 1).

Fish Hoek Middle School is housed on the original high school site with over 500 students in standards 5, 6 and 7 (grades 7, 8 and 9). It offers the compulsory exam subjects of English, Afrikaans, Mathematics, General Science, History and Geography, as well as a wide range of elective subjects. Class sizes appear to be around twenty-five students.

The School defines its mission as:

- to develop and encourage in pupils and staff: self discipline, commitment, responsibility, motivation, social awareness, versatility and initiative;
- to recognise and cater for the individual intellectual, physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cultural needs of the early adolescent, and to provide a curriculum and mode of instruction that meets the above needs;
- to provide a learning environment which is disciplined, yet positive and happy;
- to foster a high degree of both parental and community awareness and involvement in pupils' development and progress.

(Fish Hoek Middle School 1995, p.2)

Middle Schooling Practices at Fish Hoek Middle School

(a) Interdisciplinary Team Organisation

At standard 5 (grade 7) interdisciplinary team teaching is considered the key organising principle. Here, a small group of five teachers work together as a team to teach the core curriculum (English, mathematics, history, science,

geography) to all students across the year level. The core teachers have regular and substantial timetabled meeting time (five periods over an eight-day cycle) which enables them to discuss students and curriculum and so to promote a more coherent approach. Appendix C, a page from the standard 5 timetable, shows the organisation of teaching and the timetabled meeting time over a two-day period.

(b) Guidance Program and Support for Students in Need

In addition to guidance classes and access to the services of a full time guidance counsellor that are part of the program for all students at Fish Hoek Middle School, students in standard 5 attend a Guidance Advisory Programme (GAP), which consists of two periods each week. Each GAP group consists of approximately ten to twelve students and an adult facilitator, a number of whom are parent volunteers. The aim of this programme is to help students successfully negotiate the changes in their lives (including from elementary school to secondary school), to develop a sense of belonging, and to help students develop significant relationships with peers and with an adult mentor or supporter.

These sessions usually comprise an activity followed by group discussion. Topics covered include friendship, family relationships, healthy living, values clarification, assertiveness, decision making and conflict resolution.

The commonest approach in South African schools to help students who are having difficulties with study is for teachers to give of their own time to provide assistance in informal or formalised settings.[2] Fish Hoek Middle School is no exception. The school provides supervised homework classes for students that need support from 2.45 pm to 4.15 pm each school day.

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[2] There are fewer students in school than there are out of school in South Africa. In many cases this changes quite considerably traditional notions of 'students at risk', and students with 'learning difficulties'. The concept that all students must be given opportunities to learn are clearly irrelevant in this situation - and most students at risk of not succeeding in school are not in school. Similarly the student teacher ratio in many of the schools (together with an exam-driven curriculum, and the training of teachers) leads to a predominantly content-based, teacher transmission pedagogy which mitigates against modified learning for students that struggle. The lack of resources that sees some schools without even paper and pens also makes provision of trained support personnel in this area very unlikely.

(c) Mini Course Program

A form of exploratory structure, the mini course program allows for student choice and for development of individual and personal interests. Such exploration is also in keeping with the needs of students in early adolescence who are engaged in complex developmental tasks like identity formation and development of independence and decision-making.

The courses allow students to develop talents or interests, to acquire new leisure time activities, to explore a range of possible future interests or careers, and/or to develop skills that will serve them in later life.

The mini course program at Fish Hoek Middle School operates every Wednesday afternoon for 60 minutes. It is presented by teachers and a number of parents who offer courses in their own special interests, hobbies or areas of expertise. In 1995, twenty-five different courses were offered each term. These included such things as reflexology, paper making, obedience classes for dogs, calligraphy, ballroom dancing, Logo, and leatherwork. Students select each term's courses from a mini-course prospectus, which is produced each term and sent home so that students are able to select their courses in consultation with their parents.

Educational Continuity and Fish Hoek Middle School

Fish Hoek Middle School is a centrepoint in the K-12 continuum established in the community. The middle school program, in particular, is 'planned in conjunction with the primary school and with the senior high school' (Fish Hoek Middle School 1995, p. 3). Each of the schools has a 'senior staff committee' and the middle school committee meets once a term with each of the committees from the primary and senior high schools. Subject heads from each of the three schools also meet regularly. Discussions with staff at the middle school revealed a good understanding of the sort of curriculum and teaching and learning strategies used at the primary school, and this seems to have come from long term informal contact in such a close knit community as much as

through the more formal structures. This is, of course, more possible in a situation where all the students from the one primary school move on to the same secondary school, (and where, therefore, the year six and seven teachers are working with the same cohort of students) - and it is aided by a philosophy that sees each of the schools serving a different and distinct stage of learning.[3]

Fish Hoek Middle School sees itself as forming a bridge between traditional elementary and secondary education. Teachers combine subject-based expertise with knowledge and understanding of the needs of early adolescents - thus mixing the child-centred approach generally found in elementary education and the subject specialisation of upper secondary. As students move through the school, the emphasis moves from the personal and pastoral considerations predominant at standard 5 to the more specialised and subject dominated structures at standard 7 (in preparation for the transition to senior high school). However, at all times there is an emphasis on the nature and developmental needs of the group of students who make up the middle school - students in early adolescence.

Current Issues and Future Directions

The teachers driving the middle schooling reforms at Fish Hoek Middle School are pioneers in their field - and as such are working without any substantial support structures beyond the school itself. As indicated earlier in this paper, the country's education administrators are grappling with much broader issues than individual school-based practices, and the teachers and school find themselves without any real assistance in their endeavours. Teachers at the school expressed a clear concern about the lack of recognition

[3] For most schools in South Africa the issue of continuity of curriculum between school sectors is generally a difficult one. The system overall is moving from a situation where it had many different and separate education departments, all doing things in different and unequal ways to a more even and coordinated structure. Even so, there are as yet still vast differences in educational experiences from one student to another. There are also dramatic changes that have taken place and are still taking place in the schools - many have closed and have lost or had their records destroyed, and many are now closing, changing identity or reopening with very different student cohorts. Due to population displacements and years of political unrest, students are returning to school with little previous education and/or with no documentation or records of their previous learning - many after a break of many years. Education for many of these students is discontinuous in ways that are completely foreign to the general Australian or Northern American understanding. Also relevant is the fact that the vast majority of students don't proceed past year 9. It is not surprising that the South African government and many of its schools prioritise continuity of schooling ahead of continuity of curriculum, which for many there might seem an ephemeral cause.

for the work they were doing and the lack of career paths and options for teachers who work with junior secondary students only. In fact it was the paucity of promotion opportunities in the area that had several seeking positions at the town's high school. There was also a concern about the lack of relevant professional development activities. The teachers were developing a range of student-centred pedagogies, with an emphasis on group work and active learning - but had few opportunities to develop these practices or talk with other practitioners in the field about new ideas. Many of the teachers at standard 5 were eager to use their interdisciplinary team organisation and common planning time to develop a more integrated approach to curriculum design, but again had few models or experiences within their own country to draw upon. This lack of relevant professional development limited the extent to which the school was able to utilise its structural reforms to engage in teaching and learning that was relevant, generally accessible, and developmentally appropriate for the young adolescents with whom they were working.

The national examination system that exists from standard 5 onwards has also had an impact on curriculum and instruction at the school. It leaves little room for authentic assessment, and leads to content driven learning and transmission model pedagogy. Negotiation of curriculum and differentiated learning are at odds with such a centralised external examination regime.

Negotiation, differentiation, authenticity and relevance are areas that the teachers at Fish Hoek Middle School are keen to explore. They have made the developmental needs of their early adolescent students the basis of their education planning, and have done much already on that basis. In some ways their reforms and ideals have transcended the current imperatives of their national context. In other ways they have not. Perhaps, in the end, the inspiration and support they desire and deserve must come from an international educational community rather than a national one.

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APPENDIX A:
South African National Qualification Framework

LEVEL	QUALIFICATION	
8 7 6	Masters & PhD Professional Qualifications Degrees	
5	Advanced Certificate	
4 3 2	Further Education Certificate (A system of credits that combine for qualification on a modular basis)	
1	General Education Certificate	
	Schooling	Adult Basic Education
	end of standard 7 compulsory 9 years plus educare (prep)	ABET level 3 ABET level 2 ABET level 1

APPENDIX B:
Guiding Principles of the 1995 South African White Paper on Education and Training

- The over-arching goal of policy must be to enable all individuals to value, have access to, and succeed in *lifelong education and training of good quality.* Educational and management processes must therefore put the learners first, recognising and building on their knowledge and experience, and responding to their needs.
- The improvement of the *quality* of education and training services is essential.... quality is required across the board. It is linked to the *capacity and commitment of the teacher,* the *appropriateness of the curriculum,* and the way standards are set and assessed.
- The restoration of the *culture of teaching, learning and management* involves the creation of a *culture of accountability.* This means the development of a *common purpose or mission* among students, teachers, principals and governing bodies, with clear, mutually agreed and understood responsibilities, and lines of cooperation and accountability.
- The curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training, should encourage *independent and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgements, achieve understanding, recognise the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge, and communicate clearly.*
- An *appropriate mathematics, science and technology initiative is* essential to stem the waste of talent, and make up the chronic national deficit, in these fields of learning, which are crucial to human understanding and to economic advancement.
- Environmental education, involving an inter-disciplinary, integrated and active approach to learning, must be a vital element of all levels and programmes of the education and training system, in order to create *environmentally literate and active citizens* and ensure that all South Africans, present and future, enjoy a decent quality of life through the sustainable use of resources.
- The Ministry of Education is committed to a *fully participatory process of curriculum development and trialing, ...* The process must be *open and transparent,* with proposals and critique being requested from any person or bodies with interests in the learning process and learning outcomes.
- Provincial departments of education have significant scope for defining learning programmes which express distinct provincial interests and priorities, should they wish to do so.... School-based 'micro' adaptations can be an important means of professional development, as well as expressing particular interests of the school and its community.

APPENDIX C
Fish Hoek Middle School Timetable

TIMETABLE 1995
STANDARD 5
DAY 1

PERIOD CLASS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5Ck	Afrikaans 2 Ck	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	Geography Sa	Art Al	
5Dn	Afrikaans 1 En Afrikaans 2 Br	History Ck	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	Bible Education Kn	Guidance Ka
5Gd	Afrikaans 1 En Afrikaans 2 Gd	Science Dn	Geography Sa	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Bible Education Ml	Media Hr
5Mc	Afrikaans 1 En Afrikaans 2 Sw	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	History Ck	English Mc	Handwork Am Mb	
5Sa	Afrikaans 2 Mn	English Sa Hr	Mathematics Ck	Geography Sa	History Ck	Xhosa Mn	Bible Education Kn
Meetings						ITT Planning Meeting Ck Dn Gd Mc Sa	

DAY 2

PERIOD CLASS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5Ck	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	History Ck	Geography Sa	Afrikaans 2 Ck	Bible Education Md
5Dn	Geography Sa	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	History Ck	Afrikaans 1 En Afrikaans 2 Br	Computer Literacy Mc
5Gd	History Ck	Geography Sa	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	Afrikaans 1 En Afrikaans 2 Gd	Guidance Ka
5Mc	Science Dn	History Ck	Geography Sa	English Mc	Mathematics Gd	Afrikaans 1 En Afrikaans 2 Sw	Bible Education Ol
5Sa	Mathematics Gd	Science Dn	History Ck	Geography Sa	English Mc	Media Hr	Xhosa Mn
Meetings							